

# Preaching Christ in the Power of the Spirit

by Arturo G. Azurdia

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*Arturo G. Azurdia emphasizes the necessity of the Holy Spirit in preaching Christ effectively and the paradox of the gospel's power in weakness.*

**Duration:** 1:10:00

**Scripture:** Luke 24:32, Luke 24:44, John 17:17, Acts 17:3, 1 Corinthians 1:17, 2 Corinthians 4:5, Hebrews 4:12

**Topics:** "Preaching Christ"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of living a worthy life based on the teachings of the Bible. He highlights the need to speak in a wholesome and uplifting manner, as it is a reflection of our response to God's grace. The preacher also emphasizes the importance of connecting moral imperatives with redemptive indicatives, meaning that our actions should be rooted in the gospel message. He encourages parents to teach their children to obey in the Lord, ensuring that they understand the gospel context behind their obedience. Additionally, the preacher emphasizes the need to understand the big story of the Bible, which is God's purpose to save his people through Jesus Christ, and to approach the study of the Bible with both a contextual and theological lens.

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## Transcript

Good evening. I've just spent the last four or five days with about 500 African American pastors, and they do that a lot better than you do. Good evening.

Very good, thank you. I must tell you, you know, Gary, like Mike said, Gary is very, very good. But I just spent three days in San Francisco at a thing called the National Bible Conference with several hundred African American pastors, and there were two of us there who were not African American.

We were regarded as the Vanilla Brothers, and the theme was the Bible. And about two weeks ago, I called the fellow who was hosting the conference. It was at the Marriott Hotel in San Francisco, and I said to him, you know, President Campbell, a bunch of guys, they're all speaking on the Bible.

Maybe we ought to have a little conversation so that we don't preach the same thing. And he said, well, we're just going to trust the Lord, brother, and he'll work it out. I said, okay.

So I brought three messages with me. John 17, sanctify them by the truth, your word is truth. Hebrews chapter 4, word is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword.

And then I brought another thing that I just kind of thought, well, you know, maybe I'll do that, but I don't think so. I'll just keep that kind of in reserve. I got there in the opening night.

Dr. Robert Smith from Beeson Divinity School preached John 17. Following him, Joel Gregory preached Hebrews 4. And so needless to say, I didn't sleep very much that night. And I just found out a few moments before dinner tonight, I was here under the assumption that I was to preach three times and to have a Q&A time and found out just a few minutes before dinner that I'm supposed to speak four times.

So please don't ask me what I'm going to do on Wednesday, okay? And pray for me and we'll trust that God has a word for you, even though we didn't plan it that way. His purposes are always perfect. I'd like to thank Pastor Mike Jones and Gary Smith for inviting me.

Thank you very much to Jay and whoever else is responsible for granting me this privilege. I do love pastors. It is the hardest work.

It is the most painstaking work. It is the most heartbreaking work there is, I think, in this world, this side of heaven. And I very much appreciate what Jay said.

Some of you here are enjoying the ecstasy of the pastoral task, and I rejoice with you and hope that you'll give me the opportunity to celebrate that with you and to give thanks and praise to God. Some of you here are experiencing the agony of ministry, and I hope that you'll give me the opportunity to get acquainted with you and pray with you because in 19 years of pastoral ministry and four years as a staff person prior to that, I've known both of those things. I've known those moments of ecstasy, but I have also known those very dark nights of the soul when I have pled with the living God to let me do anything other than what I was doing.

And, friends, I think this side of heaven, that's always the way it's going to be. That's the nature of true apostolic ministry. And so if you're here and you are feeling low, then let us love you and encourage you and help you and support you in this great and awesome task because we remember that the Apostle Paul felt precisely the same way.

It's the nature of the task, and it keeps us dependent upon the living God, which is always good for us, given the fact that we're so instinctively prone to idolatry. And so God be with you, and I hope that your time here these days are a blessing. Open your Bible.

Would you be so kind to do that to Luke chapter 24? Luke chapter 24. Maybe on Wednesday we'll come back to this passage. I really want to use it only to kickstart us in a direction, not because I want to do an exposition here.

We're going to end up in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, which you'll see in just a few moments. Allow me to pray. Would you please? Father in God, I thank you for this church, for its ministry, for its testimony, for its faithfulness.

And I thank you, O Lord and God, for every congregation represented in this room, for the ministry of the IFCA and the Pacific Northwest. And I do pray and ask, O Lord, that for each one of us these would be strategic days, memorable days, impressionable days, that when we've long since forgotten where the conference was held and who spoke, we would nonetheless remember that these were days when our lives were powerfully impacted for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of preaching your word. How we are so desperately in need of the work of your Holy Spirit in us and through us.

We ask, O Lord and God, that you would join us in such a profound way that every man here engaged in the pastoral enterprise would be built up and encouraged and strengthened and challenged where needed, convicted, but most of all pointed to the great and mighty and wondrous Savior that it is our joy to exalt. And we pray these prayers, O Lord and God, with a measure of confidence knowing already that it is the burden of your Spirit to glorify Jesus. We just want to align ourselves with His agenda.

So we ask you now, Father, to send your Spirit among us. We know theologically He's everywhere present. We also know that His demonstrable effects are sovereignly dispensed different ways on different occasions.

What we ask for today and tomorrow and Wednesday is a powerful expression of His ministry in our midst. We love you. Amen.

Luke 24, you know the scene. It is one of my favorite chapters in all of the Bible for various reasons, as you'll discover over the next couple of days, I think. But picking up the story in Luke 13, I'll just read.

Now that same day, this is the day of the resurrection, of course. Two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. Together they were discussing everything that had taken place.

And while they were discussing and arguing, Jesus Himself came near and began to walk along with them. But they were prevented from recognizing Him. That's an amazing thing.

We see that about the glorified state of the Lord Jesus Christ, that very often He could appear to people without them recognizing who He is, that somehow in His glorified state, His recognition was dependent on His own purposes. But they were prevented from recognizing Him. Then He asked them, what is this dispute that you're having with each other as you're walking? And they stopped walking and looked discouraged.

And I think this is a hilarious conversation, of course, Jesus knowing precisely what has taken place. But He plays along. The one named Cleopas answered Him, are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that happen there in these days? And we ought to be laughing, see? We ought to be snickering.

And He says, what things? So they said to Him, the things concerning Jesus the Nazarene. Have you ever heard of Him? Who was a prophet, powerful in action and speech before God and all the people. And how our chief priests and leaders handed Him over to be sentenced to death and they crucified Him.

But we were hoping that He was the one who was about to redeem Israel. Besides all this, it's the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women, little chauvinistic shot there, some women from our group astounded us.

Can you believe the women? They arrived early at the tomb and when they didn't find His body, they came and reported that they had seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they didn't see Him. He said to them, how unwise and slow you are.

Now stop right there. This is amazing. How foolish and how dim-witted.

Here, the resurrected Lord chastises His men. But my friends, this is amazing because He chastises them now. Notice, not for not knowing something that they could not have known, but for not knowing something that they should have known.

How unwise and slow you are to believe in your hearts all that the prophets have spoken. Didn't you read the Old Testament? Didn't the Messiah have to suffer these things and enter into His glory? Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, the totality of the Old Testament, He interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. Is that how you use the Old Testament? They came near the village where they were going and He gave the impression that He was going farther, but they urged Him, stay with us because it's almost evening and now the day is almost over.

So of course He did. Then He disappears, verse 32, so they said to each other, weren't our hearts ablaze within us while He was talking with us on the road and explaining the Scriptures to us using the Old Testament to show us how they pointed to the Messiah? Verse 44, Jesus appears to these disciples again later in the day. Then He told them, these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you.

This is the sum and substance of what I've taught you for the last three years, guys. That everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms, the Tanakh, that all of the Old Testament must be fulfilled. Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

God, give us this. He also said to them, now watch, this is what is written. This is fascinating here.

This is what is written. Here we have, dear friends, the resurrected Christ's inspired interpretation of the Old Testament. I find this fascinating because at the end of the day, I do not want a hermeneutic that is a product of 18th century scholastic rationalism.

I want a hermeneutic that is Christian. I want a hermeneutic that is apostolic. And whatever we see the apostles doing in the book of Acts by way of using the Old Testament, we know that they learned it from Jesus.

He told them, these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. He also said to them, this is what is written.

Genesis to Malachi. The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

And look, I am sending you what my Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high. Now, my dear friends, in the Gospel of John, chapter 14, 15, 16, Jesus Himself promises the coming of the Holy Spirit that as a result of His redemptive accomplishments, because He goes to the Father, is the language that He repeatedly uses, God's new covenant promise would be given to the people of God.

The Spirit of the living God would come and take up residence within Christians so that by His power they might accomplish what Jesus calls the greater works, the advancement of the Gospel. The primary ministry of the Holy Spirit, it's wrapped up in the name that Jesus gives to Him. He will be the Spirit of truth.

He calls Him that on numbers of occasions. He is the Spirit of truth, and He doesn't mean there He's a true spirit as though He's getting at the essential nature of the Spirit. Of course, that is also accurate.

But the phrase the Spirit of truth is what we call an objective genitive. It means the Spirit who communicates truth, the Spirit who reveals truth, the sacred communicator. He will reveal truth objectively by means of inspiring the New Testament Scriptures, and subjectively by means of illuminating those Scriptures to the people of God.

And apart from that supernatural work, you see, the mind of God will never be known by any of us because the totality of our humanity has been so radically affected by sin. This is where as Protestants we diverge from traditional Roman Catholicism. Roman Catholicism says you need an inspired interpreter because the Bible is filled with all kinds of mysteries and all kinds of hidden secretive things that only an inspired interpreter can understand.

Luther and the Reformers come along and they say no, no, no, no, the problem is not with the Bible. The Bible is... What's the word they used? That very difficult word? Purr. The Bible is perspicuous.

No, rather the problem is with us. That's why the Bible is hard to understand because we've been so radically affected by sin. And so Jesus promises that the Spirit of Truth will come.

And who is the object of the truth that the Spirit reveals? Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus Christ came to glorify His Father, so the Spirit of God has now come to glorify Jesus. And how does He do this? Through a multiplicity of ways that ultimately all originate from one infallible source, the Holy Spirit accomplishes His preeminent purpose, that of glorifying Jesus through the means of an inscripturated word that from cover to cover rivets its focus on one primary person, Jesus.

Well, my friends, if it is the Spirit's intention to glorify Jesus Christ, and the principle means by which He accomplishes that objective is through the inscripturated word that centers on Jesus Christ, how does He intend for that word to be made known? And what you see is that not only is God definitive concerning His message, He's equally definitive concerning His method. And Luke 24 makes that so abundantly clear. The word of Jesus Christ is to be made known through the proclamation of preachers who with that message on their lips will be clothed with the power of the Spirit of God, a power that can overcome the most violent resistance of sinners and bring them willingly joyfully happily and wholeheartedly into the saving arms of Jesus Christ.

I'm not here to talk about theological controversy, my friends, but one wonders if we would have ever had a difficulty with the whole lordship business had we only rightly understood what it is that the Spirit of God accomplishes in regeneration. This is ministry distinct to the New Covenant people of God. Christ is our message.

Preaching Christ from all of the Bible is our method, and the power of the purchased Spirit of God is our means. That's established for us in the Gospel with crystal clarity, and maybe we'll come back to this on Wednesday. What is interesting, however, now is as we move deeper into the New Testament, we see that the practice of apostolic ministry was in every way consistent with this instruction of Jesus, particularly as it relates to the message, the method, and means for ministry.

And of all the passages to which we could turn to make this evident, and there are many, friends, the one I think that's most plain and obvious is 1 Corinthians chapter 2. So turn there with me. 1 Corinthians chapter

2, what Martin Lloyd-Jones, in his day, Lloyd-Jones died in 81, he said this may be the single most important passage for Christian ministry in our generation, 1 Corinthians chapter 2. Now before we dig in, it is very important that we understand something of the context in which this passage appears, its broad context and its more immediate context. Of all Paul's letters, the two that have been preserved as 1 and 2 Corinthians are filled with what we might call Christian paradoxes, statements that seem to be self-contradictory.

For example, in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, he talks about strength that is perfected in weakness. That's contradictory. In 2 Corinthians 6, he talks about poor men who make others rich, about those who have nothing but possess all things.

He talks about being sorrowful, but always rejoicing, about being unknown and yet well-known, about dying yet living. In 1 Corinthians 7, he says to men who are married, live as though you have no wives. Now all of these paradoxes you see are woven into the fabric of the Corinthian letters, but at the heart of all these various paradoxes is the one great and ultimate paradox that appears in the opening chapter of the first letter.

The paradox, dear friends, of the gospel itself. The seemingly contradictory fact that a weak and foolish message contains the power and wisdom of God. And Paul, you see, he addresses this concern because in part, these Corinthians had obviously grown ashamed of the gospel.

I mean, they were living in a day and in a place that prized philosophy and great oratorical powers and the rhetoricians of their day. And beyond all of that, of course, you know from reading the early portions of the first Corinthians that people were lining up under their favorite leaders. And of course, I can tell you, friends, from a very practical vantage point, when Christians become enamored with men and the messages, the methods of men, they inevitably lose their message.

Always, always, always. When people get enamored with men and the methods of men, the message is the thing that always gets scuttled. This man impresses me.

I like his gifts. This technique impresses me. It will win the day.

But when a man or a method has captivated your impressions, my dear friends, you can be sure that you've lost sight of the message, which is always to be the supreme and central thing. Well, the Corinthians, susceptible to the attitudes of their day, just as we are in ours, had fallen prey to this very thing. What was buzzing around them? What was buzzing around them in sophisticated Corinth? Well, the message of the gospel.

The message of a crucified Savior, a bloody Messiah. You saw the picture. You've got to be kidding.

Who wants a Messiah like that? How, and the word Paul uses over and over in the original is, how moronic, how foolish, how impotent. And it doesn't take a whole lot to figure the pressure that those Corinthians must have felt. Perhaps they've grown a bit embarrassed of that message of the gospel, of the cross, and so right out of the chutes, you see Paul comes at this thing and he says, here is a paradox, my Corinthian brothers.

The very things that seem weak and foolish to the world around you are the very things that display the glory of God, and in particular, the very things that the world mocks, God's power and God's wisdom. And he proves this by calling upon three lines of evidence. First, God's power and God's wisdom are displayed

in the weak and foolish message that provides salvation for those who believe.

That's 18 to 25. Notice verse 18, for to those who are perishing, the message of the cross is foolishness. Verse 21, for since in God's wisdom the world did not know God through wisdom, God was pleased to save those who believed through the foolishness of the message preached.

If you have a King James Bible, with all due respect, the translation is wrong. The issue is not the foolishness of preaching. The emphasis in the original text is the foolishness of the message that is preached.

It's preached to be sure, but what's foolish here is the gospel, the cross. Verse 22, for the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. Corinthians, the things that seem weak and foolish to the world around you are the very things that display the power and wisdom of God.

Yet to those who are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ is God's power and God's wisdom, because God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. A weak and foolish message, it contains the wisdom and power of God. Second line of evidence, God's power and wisdom are displayed in weak and foolish people.

I love this. That's paragraph, well, verses 26 to 31. The foolish people that God himself has determined to save.

Brothers, consider your calling. Not many are wise from a human perspective, not many powerful, not many of noble birth. To the contrary, instead God has chosen the world's foolish things to shame the wise.

This is us, friends. And God has chosen the world's weak things to shame the strong. God has chosen the world's insignificant and despised things, the things viewed as nothing so that he might bring to nothing the things that are viewed as something, so that no one can boast in his presence.

Let me remind you of something, dear Corinthians. You were not saved because you were such a great bunch to get. You're not saved because in getting you, God was really getting a great deal.

Quite to the contrary, you were the dregs. You were the bottom of the barrel. But that's the point, you see.

Your utter unworthiness, your obvious weakness and foolishness magnifies the power and wisdom of our great God. But from him you are in Christ Jesus. In other words, it's owing all to him who for us became wisdom from God as well as righteousness, sanctification and redemption so that, in order that, there's the purpose clause, as it is written, the one who boasts must boast in the Lord.

The things that seem weak and foolish to the world around you are the very things that display the power and wisdom of God. A weak and foolish message a weak and foolish people. And thirdly then, we now come to the paragraph upon which we will focus our efforts over these days together.

The third of the illustrations Paul employs and that is this, that God's power and wisdom are displayed in the weak and foolish ministers who attempt to accomplish his work. When I came to you, brothers, think about me. When I came to you, brothers, announcing the testimony of God to you, I did not come with brilliance of speech or wisdom, for I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And I was with you in weakness, in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom but with a demonstration of the Spirit and power so that your faith might not be based on men's wisdom but on God's power. Think about me, Corinthians.

When I showed up in Corinth, there was nothing impressive about me, was there? In fact, truth be known, I was rather unimpressive, wasn't I? But that's the point I'm trying to make. The very things that seem weak and foolish to the world around you are the very things that display the power and wisdom of our God. And right here, friends, now in these five verses, Paul takes us back to the very things that were set forth before us by Jesus himself.

The true new covenant ministry to true New Testament apostolic, and I say that with a lowercase a, true apostolic ministry is characterized by a determination to proclaim a foolish message, a determination to appropriate a foolish method, and a determination to rest upon a foolish means. And why is this so? Because the very things that seem weak and foolish to the world around us are the very things that display the power and wisdom of our God, a foolish message, a foolish method, and a foolish means. Now for this evening, I want us only to consider the first.

Here's principle number one. Here's where we're going to camp for the rest of our time this evening. A new covenant ministry is characterized by a determination to proclaim a foolish message.

It is characterized by a determination to proclaim a foolish message. Now friends, I don't know about you, but that arouses a question in my mind. Why would anyone wish to be a proclaimer of a message that he knows the world will regard as foolish? He says it in verse 18.

The message of the cross is foolishness. Verse 21, God was pleased to save those who believed through the foolishness of the message preached. Verse 23, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

Why would anybody sign up to proclaim that word? Why would anybody in their right mind choose to be a preacher of all things if God would allow him to do anything else? It's Bruce Thielman who captures this idea best when he says, the pulpit calls those anointed to it as the sea calls its sailors. And like the sea, it batters and bruises and does not rest. To preach, to really preach, is to die naked a little at a time and to know each time you do it that you must do it again.

I mean, my friends, you can easily understand why a great many men look to compromise that message, can't you? I mean, all things being equal, I have no desire to be thought to be foolish or uninformed or unsophisticated or unenlightened. Why would anybody want to preach a message so universally regarded as foolish? Why would a person set himself up for such abuse? The answer is because of the origination of that message. Notice verse 1. When I came to you, brothers, announcing the testimony of God.

Now, some of the manuscripts read the mystery of God. The difference is very slight, of no significance to me in terms of the emphasis I'm trying to make. But notice how Paul here refers to the content of his preaching.

I came to you announcing, declaring, proclaiming, heralding the testimony of God. Some of you may have an NIV at this point, and it says the testimony about God, but that certainly is a mistranslation. This is what we call a subjective genitive.

This isn't a testimony about God. This is God's own testimony. You say, well, what's the difference? The testimony of God, testimony about God.

Well, think about it like this. It's one thing to show up at a meeting and to say, I would like to give a testimony to what God is doing in my life. Now, those kinds of things can be profoundly encouraging, can't they? And they're important to a healthy life together in a congregation.

But as wonderful as that may be, it's another thing altogether for a man to show up and say, I bring to you a testimony from God himself. Which tells us this right here, friends, that Paul's message is not the offspring of reason. It is the gift of revelation.

This message did not grow out of the creative genius of a man. It does not reflect the collective wisdom of a group of first century mystics or philosophers or religious folk. It is a message that originated with God.

And there you see is the reason why some men will be prepared to lose everything for that message rather than compromise it. It's a conviction, you see, that grows out of an understanding that this is God's message to us. And what's the content, brothers, of God's testimony? Verse 2. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucify.

I might add that this had always been Paul's approach. Wherever he went. I say that because there may be some of you here.

I run across people from time to time and this amazes me. When I meet people who've done a little bit of study in 1 Corinthians or maybe a little bit of study in the book of Acts and you know that Paul went to Corinth after he had just been in Athens and some people suggest that while he was in Athens he kind of attempted this novel approach to preaching and it kind of bombed. It was a miserable failure.

By the time he got to Corinth, he'd straightened himself out and his new resolve was to preach Jesus. But my dear friends, not only does that kind of thinking reveal a woeful ignorance of the overall book of Acts, which shows us that Paul's pattern was always to preach Christ wherever he went. It also reveals a blind-sightedness to the immediate context of Acts 17 which tells us that while Paul was in Athens, he was regularly preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

In fact, in the sermon itself, Acts 17, he preaches the resurrection and the judgment to come. What's more, Luke tells us at the end of that sermon that there were actually people who were saved under his preaching. Are people always saved under your preaching? They're not under mine.

Acts 17 is not a miserable failure and it is not an anomaly in the preaching style of the Apostle Paul. So when he says here, I was determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified, he's not referring to a radical breach that he now makes with a former ministry methodology that he had tampered with for a while in Athens. If there's any contrast to be found here, it was the Greek philosophers and orators who were so prominently prized in Corinth.

Now, you've studied some of this stuff. These guys would come to town, they would set up shop on a street corner, they'd get a crowd around, and they were massively gifted human beings. And so they would say, what do you want me to talk about? Someone would say, butterflies! And right there on the spot, one of these Greek rhetoricians would wax eloquent about butterflies, keeping people spellbound with his use of language, bringing them to tears, causing them to laugh, powerfully moving their emotion by the use of human words.

And then, he would pass the hat. And rhetoricians in Corinth did very nicely, thank you very much. Paul's message, on the other hand, the message from which he never allowed himself to deviate, originated with God and centered on Jesus Christ.

Originated with God, centered on Jesus Christ. And my dear friends, now I do believe, and I'm going to talk with you about this over the course of the next couple of days, I do believe, yes I do, that every message we preach needs to be vitally connected to Jesus Christ and Him crucified, otherwise it isn't a Christian message. Now, that doesn't mean that every message needs to be evangelistic.

It does mean that every message needs to be evangelical. And there is a difference, you see. That's the regulative principle for all Christian preaching.

It needs to be evangelical, preoccupied with the evangel. One of my friends says it this way, true Christian preaching must center on the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross is the central doctrine of the Holy Scriptures.

All other revealed truths either find their fulfillment in the cross or are necessarily founded upon it. Therefore, no doctrine of Scripture may faithfully be set before man unless it is displayed in its relationship to the cross. The one who is called to preach, therefore, must preach Christ because there is no other message from God.

I must tell you, I've been astounded by the lack of this since I've been in the Pacific Northwest. I mean, I've only been here since late December. And I was telling a couple of the brothers at dinner, the first three Sundays I visited churches, in the first two services, Jesus was never mentioned once in the preaching, only in the singing.

And in the third service, the name of Jesus was not mentioned once at all in the service in its entirety. I wish I could tell you that that's the rare exception. But the fact of the matter is, I visit churches quite frequently and there isn't enough gospel to fill up a thimble.

Fifty-seven sermons on good elders and you never hear the name of Jesus mentioned? Sermons on various facets of systematic theology and never are these doctrines drawn back into the cross and the gospel? That's not how Paul teaches theology. Sermons on marriage coming out our ears and you hear nothing about the gospel. Everything you hear coming out of that preacher's mouth could be said by Dr. Phil.

That's not Christian preaching and that's not being faithful to the Bible. We've had people in our own church think that Dr. Laura is the greatest thing on two feet. And I want to say, Dr. Laura is the embodiment of the very thing that the book of Hebrews tells us not to do.

She's a Baptist who's become a Jew. You're going to learn about the family from her? Why is Jesus Christ and Him crucified the nucleus of all Christian preaching? Well, there are many reasons. Let me give you briefly the three most obvious, I think.

Number one, there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. No one comes to the Father but through me. To all who are being saved, the cross of Christ is the power of God.

And brothers, I want to remind you, those of you given to expositional ministry like me, please do not forget that over against everything else you do, the glory of God and the salvation of sinners is our work. That's why we preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified. There's a second reason, and it may be in fact more compelling on a practical level.

It is because Jesus Christ is the focal point of all biblical revelation. He's just told us how to interpret the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is the focal point of all biblical revelation, and we have not been faithful to the spirit-intended purpose of this book until we rightly exegete its parts to such a way that we see how it fits in the whole of the Bible.

So that we always ask ourselves, how is the little story contributing to the telling of the big story? What's the big story of the Bible? It's funny. I talk to evangelicals all the time. I say, what's the big story of the Bible? And they look at me like I'm from another planet.

Well, the Bible has many stories. Well, yes, the Bible has many stories, but the Bible tells one story. It starts with creation.

It ends in new creation. And there is movement from here to here. What's the story? The story is God's purpose to save his people through Jesus Christ.

Which means then, friends, that when we come to the Bible to do our work, we need to bring two kinds of lenses to this task. We need to use an exegetical magnifying glass so that we can examine with close scrutiny the details of a passage. So when I come across a word like apollutrosis, well, I need to be able to figure out what that word means.

When I come across a word like elosmos, I need to understand what that word means. I need to understand the tenses of verbs. I need to know why tetelestai's in the perfect tense.

I need to understand how participles relate to the verbs. I need to understand those little logical connectors like for and but, therefore, in order that. But that's not all.

You also need to bring to this business a theological fish eye lens so that you can see how that passage in its details fits into the overall redemptive emphasis of the Bible. And this is where I think we can learn something from the Puritans. There are a number of things from the Puritans that we ought not to learn.

But this is something that we can learn from the Puritans. It is Dr. Packer who says, Puritan preaching revolved around Christ and Him crucified, for this is the hub of the Bible. The preacher's commission is to declare the whole counsel of God, but the cross is the center of that counsel.

And the Puritans knew that the traveler through the Bible landscape misses his way as soon as he loses sight of the hill called Calvary. My friends, the center of gravity in all the biblical revelation is the cross of Christ. The center of gravity in all of the Bible is Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Everything is either pushing you toward it or reflecting back upon it. There's a third reason why our preaching ought to center on Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and that is we want to be faithful to the command of Jesus and the pattern of the apostles. Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

You shall be my witnesses. It was the command of Jesus that our preaching should be of Him. And what's more, dear friends, our apostolic forebears have provided us with a faithful pattern to follow.

Let's look at a couple of examples. Let's go to Acts chapter 5. Acts chapter 5. And maybe this is what we'll delve into a little bit more deeply on Wednesday. I don't know.

We'll see. But I want to show you at some point what it is that the New Testament teaches us about the Old Testament. Because what the New Testament teaches us about the Old Testament is in direct contradiction to how I was taught to interpret the Old Testament.

And that's a bit unnerving. Acts chapter 5, verse 42. Every day in the temple complex and in various homes they continue teaching and proclaiming, preaching the good news that the Messiah is Jesus.

Look at Acts chapter 8, verse 5. Verse 4. So those who were scattered went on their way proclaiming the message of the good news. Philip went down to a city of Samaria and preached the Messiah to them. Verse 35.

So Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus beginning from that scripture, Isaiah 53. Chapter 9, verse 20. This is Saul.

Immediately he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues. He is the Son of God. Chapter 11, verse 20.

But there were some of them, Cypriot and Cyrenian men, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Hellas, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus. Chapter 17, verse 3. A passage that we may come back to before we're finished. For three Sabbath days, verse 2, Paul reasoned with them from the scriptures.

Notice he's using the Old Testament, explaining and showing that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. Is that how you use the Old Testament? I mean, this will rattle your cage, friends, when you take the book of Acts seriously and see how the apostolic Christians readily, steadily, relentlessly use the Old Testament to point to Jesus. From all of the Old Testament, as you will see.

It's amazing. And then, of course, 1 Corinthians back there. 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 17.

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, for we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus his Lord. Galatians chapter 3, you foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.

Speaking autobiographically in Ephesians 3, to me the very least of all the saints. You know that word, the leaster. Paul invents a new word there.

This grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ. You say, well now Art, come on. All the passages that you've referred to have an evangelistic emphasis.

No one would question you at this point. Of course, in evangelistic settings, we need to preach Christ. Well, let me ask you something, my friends.

How long was Paul in Corinth? 18 months. A year and a half. In other words, his was not a short-term evangelistic crusade.

And yet he says in verse 2, I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Now our problem with that is we tend to think that Jesus Christ and him crucified means that for 18 months, all he did was repeat the four spiritual laws. And I would submit to you that that is a view that's reductionistic.

Paul understands that everything in the Bible intersects with Jesus and him crucified. And so what I'm suggesting to you, friends, is not preaching that is merely evangelistic, but preaching that is always and in every way evangelical. Well, what does that involve? Well, in the most superficial consideration, just unpack what's here.

I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus. That speaks of his person, Yeshua. Did his existence begin at Bethlehem? It forces us to plumb the depths of the incarnation.

And if he is the son of God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, what does that mean about how we think about God? He's called the Christ. That speaks of his office. He's the king.

Drives us back to one of the most significant promises we have in the Bible, 2 Samuel chapter 7. Psalm 2. Psalm 110. King. Anointed one.

And of course, when we think about that, we're reminded of the fact that the kingly office was not the only office that he fulfilled. Fulfilled a prophetic office. Fulfilled a priestly office.

Jesus Christ and him crucified. Speaks of his work. You've got to understand that.

You need to understand something about the nature of the human race. Our fall. Which began where? Which does what to us? Which affects how much of our humanity? And why crucified? It forces us to think about what happened in the Garden of Eden.

Adam and Eve clothed with the skins of dead animals. It forces us to think about what went on on the Passover. Why were those Egyptians... Why were those firstborn Israelite children preserved? Not because they were better than the Egyptians.

They were just as guilty. God for them made a provision of atonement. That forces us to the Day of Atonement when the high priest would go into the Holy of Holies and offer a sacrifice for whom? The Canaanites? Perizzites? Twelve stones represented on their breast piece.

Sacrifice for the people of God. And of course that forces us to John 1. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And that forces us to the Revelation where Jesus is referred to over and over and over again as the Lamb.

Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I would submit to you that eighteen months is not enough time to plumb the depths of the person, the offices, and the work of Jesus Christ. Eighteen years isn't enough time, brothers, to accomplish that task.

We've gotten it backwards. C.H. Dodd in the last century, that British theologian, he messed us up. He really did.

So that now we think you can't preach the gospel to Christians and you can't preach doctrine to unbelievers. To the unbelieving we preach the gospel and then as believers we can really get into the meat of the Word. And so you hear Christians say, I want to get beyond the gospel.

I want to get beyond the gospel. I want to get beyond the gospel to the real meat of the Word. And I want to tell you your spiritual life is never in greater danger than when you think I'm ready to get beyond the gospel.

May I suggest to you that that is a disjunction that the Bible itself does not make. The Bible does not separate the Word from the gospel. When the book of Acts records Paul's visit to Corinth, it says, but when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the Word.

We go, yay! And we miss the next participial phrase that defines what he means. Solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. I'm reminded of Colossians 1, which is a wonderful credo for the ministry, by the way, and has the very same components we find in 1 Corinthians 1. Colossians 1, verse 24.

You know this. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I am completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for His body, that is the church. I have become its minister according to God's administration that was given to me for you to make God's message fully known.

The mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now revealed to His saints. God wanted to make known to those among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Now watch.

We proclaim, there's the method, Him, that's the message. Now notice this little participial phrase that helps unpack that. Warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom.

Why? So that we may present everyone mature in Christ. So brothers, lest you feel unnerved by what I'm saying, is there a place for preaching the ethical commands of the Bible? Yes. Is there a place for speaking to husbands and wives? Yes.

Is there a place for establishing a Christian work ethic? Yes. Is there a place for challenging our children towards certain ethical behaviors? Yes. But never, ever, in a way that would be suited to a Jewish synagogue, or a Mormon temple, or an Islamic mosque, or a congregation made up of Unitarians.

If you preach a message, particularly from the Old Testament, that is palatable to a Jew, an Orthodox Jew, who can say, Amen, I agree, you've not preached the Bible Christianly, even though you've got your message from the Bible. I can say to a man, you want to love your wife in a selfless way. So can Louis Farrakhan.

Nothing distinctly Christian about those words. But this is Christian preaching. My dear friend, you have a command.

Love your wife. Sacrificially. To begin with, consider the source of this command.

It ultimately comes from Jesus. Consider the motivation behind such a command. He himself has loved you and given himself up for you.

Consider the source of power that can enable you to be faithful to that command. Jesus, in his accomplishment on the cross, purchased the gift of his Holy Spirit. And my dear brother, when you fall short of that command, and you most certainly will, what must you do? Go right back to that person and

that cross to find mercy and grace and forgiveness.

Now friends, that's how we preach the moral demands of the Bible. Always, that ethical imperatives are rooted in redemptive indicatives. If you remember nothing else from this session, remember that line that in the New Testament, ethical imperatives, moral imperatives are always grounded in redemptive indicatives.

And until you see that, you've not preached the Bible Christianly. I mean, there are zillions of examples of this, friends, in both Testaments. Think about how the Ten Commandments begin.

You can argue to live long day about whether or not the Ten Commandments is the perpetual law of God for the people of God. That's not what I want to talk to you about. But regardless, how does the Ten Commandments begin? Exodus 20? It's amazing when you find evangelicals who can't tell you what the Ten Commandments are.

It's very common. You know how they begin? What's that? No, that's Deuteronomy 6. How does Exodus 20 begin? What's that? No other gods before me! Wrong! This is how it begins. I am your Yahweh, I am Yahweh your Elohim who has delivered you out of Egypt.

Number one. No other gods. Ethical imperatives growing out of redemptive indicatives.

So you want to talk about let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word is as good for edification according to the need of the moment that it may give grace to those who hear. You want to talk about speech? Very, very fine. But notice the flow in Ephesians 4. It's an expression of what Paul calls walking the worthy walk.

In Ephesians 4, verse 1, walking the worthy walk is on the basis of what? Therefore, as the prisoner of Jesus Christ, I urge you, by virtue of the calling with which you have been called. Chapters 1, 2, and 3. So, speaking no unwholesome talk is an expression of the worthy walk, which is a response to what God has done for us in Christ. Moral imperatives growing out of redemptive indicatives.

You have to do that! Or you're not preaching the Bible Christianly. So that we must never give to our children a list of commands to obey divorced from their proper gospel context. We say to our children, obey your parents in the Lord.

Wonderful, but if the message they get is obey your parents, what have we done? We've stripped them of the evangelical motivation, we've cut them off from the only source of power by which they can obey, and we've failed to show them to whom they can turn when they fail to obey, and worst of all, we've invariably communicated to them that they can earn the favor of God on that occasion when they happen to obey. And what I want to tell you this evening is that is not Christian parenting. At that point, we've not come close to producing a Christian child, we've produced a clean-shaven, straight-laced moralist who will wonder at the end of the day, why is it that I need Jesus? Everything in the Bible either flows from or gravitates to Jesus and Him crucified.

It is the foolish message. But to those who are being saved, the power of God, and everything you preach, brothers, needs to intersect with that. All of Revelation needs to be interpreted from Revelation's highest point, the coming of God in Jesus Christ.

Let me read this. This is fascinating. Unless we identify the redemptive purposes in a text, it is possible to say all the right words and yet send all the wrong signals.

I witness this miscommunication almost daily on the top-rated radio station in our city that broadcasts a morning meditation. Each morning, the preacher addresses some topic with a Bible verse or two. The subjects run the gamut from procrastination to parenting to honesty on the job.

The station turns up the reverberation whenever this preacher speaks so that it sounds as though the words come direct from Mount Sinai. Not to pay attention seems like a sin. I would guess that even few question the content of the man's words.

As he reminds us from the Bible to practice punctuality, good parenting, and business propriety, I realize 100,000 motorists are nodding their heads and saying in unison, that's right. That's how we should live. I've even played tapes of this preacher's meditation to seminary classes and asked if anyone can discern error in what he says.

Rarely does anyone spot a problem. The preacher quotes his text accurately. He advocates moral causes and he encourages loving behaviors.

The problem that I point out to students and that is carefully hidden from the broadcast audience is that the radio preacher is not a Christian. He represents a large cult headquartered in our region. How can this be? How can so many Christians, even those well-informed, so readily grant assent to one whose communications are radically anti-Christian? Some answer that their lack of protest results from the radio preacher's care to avoid saying anything controversial.

They contend that he hides his heresy beneath a veil of right-sounding orthodoxy. Such defenses miss the point even as his proponents have missed the problem. The radio preacher has not hidden his heresy.

He exposes it every time he speaks in what he fails to say. The real problem is that evangelical preachers inadvertently and so frequently present such similar messages that Christians fail to hear the difference between a message that purports to be biblical and one that actually is. A message that merely advocates morality and compassion remains sub-Christian even if the preacher can prove that the Bible demands such behavior.

I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Isn't that interesting? It certainly wasn't what people wanted. The Jews wanted signs and wonders and miracles.

Sound like today? The Greeks wanted philosophy and wisdom and intellectualism? Sound like today? What I find to be so very interesting, my dear brothers, is that we are living in a day when we are being told if you want to have a really successful church, find out what people want and provide that very thing for them. Paul's approach was so different. What people demanded from Paul, he refused to give.

What they had no interest in hearing, he continued to supply. The Jews want signs. The Greeks want wisdom.

We preach Christ crucified foolishness to men. Foolishness. It is the power of God, he says.

And what I want you to understand, dear brothers, is this. The moment you empty the cross of its foolishness, you empty the cross of its power. It will always and forever be regarded as foolish.

You say, well, Lord, you certainly don't believe that you will affect the lives of people by just preaching the gospel, that we really need the sophisticated media programs and the drama and the concerts. The cross is offensive. It's off-putting to modern man, more off-putting to post-modern man.

I don't doubt it, but it is the power of God. And brothers, a true apostolic ministry, a true new covenant ministry is characterized by this very determination that I will not surrender a commitment to proclaim a foolish message. Why? Because God displays his power in the weak and foolish thing.

And that's what you must resolve to do. You have to preach the paradox, power, wisdom, life in a bloody cross, because it's the power of God. Let's pray together, shall we? Our Father, we do love you, and we acknowledge what, of course, you already know.

We are bombarded by siren voices calling us away from the gospel, wanting us to be preoccupied with every other message under the sun but the gospel. Messages, perhaps, in and of themselves, that are good and that have value, but nevertheless, at the end of the day, they pull us away from the chief, central, and supreme thing. Father, every one of us here feels the tug of that temptation, perhaps even at this moment tonight, some more than others.

Perhaps some have begun to move down a particular path, but in the back of their mind there is that gnawing sense that what they're doing is somehow less than Christian. I pray, O Lord and God, that at the end of the day, more than wanting a big church, more than wanting a successful ministry by the world's standards, that we would rest our confidence upon that one thing which will always in this life be regarded as foolish, that we will be men of the book who relentlessly from all corners in that book point people to Jesus Christ. May that be true of our churches.

May it be true of our preaching. Deliver us, O God, from the tyranny of fads and novelties and superficial successes. Help us to want more than anything else to desire making people Christians.

We love you. Amen.

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